

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) would have voted "yea."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 57, nays 42, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 124 Ex.]

YEAS—57

Alexander	Ernst	Murkowski
Barrasso	Fischer	Nelson
Bennet	Flake	Paul
Blunt	Gardner	Perdue
Boozman	Graham	Portman
Burr	Grassley	Risch
Capito	Hatch	Roberts
Carper	Heitkamp	Rounds
Cassidy	Heller	Rubio
Cochran	Hoeven	Sasse
Collins	Inhofe	Scott
Coons	Johnson	Shelby
Corker	Kennedy	Strange
Cornyn	King	Sullivan
Cotton	Lankford	Thune
Crapo	Lee	Tillis
Cruz	McCain	Toomey
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Moran	Young

NAYS—42

Baldwin	Harris	Peters
Blumenthal	Hassan	Reed
Booker	Heinrich	Sanders
Brown	Hirono	Schatz
Cantwell	Kaine	Schumer
Cardin	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Casey	Leahy	Stabenow
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Tester
Donnelly	Markley	Udall
Duckworth	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Durbin	Menendez	Warner
Feinstein	Merkley	Warren
Franken	Murphy	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Murray	Wyden

NOT VOTING—1

Isakson

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The Senator from Florida.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida.

VENEZUELA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I rise to speak briefly this afternoon on the ongoing crisis in Venezuela. There is a growing interest in the matter here among my colleagues in the Senate and the White House and other places—certainly, in the press—and thankfully so. This has been going on now for a significant period of time.

Just to put it in context, a lot of times, when we talk about these sorts of showdowns around the world—these sorts of internal strife—there is this notion that there is this government in place and there is this group that does not like the government and that they are arguing with each other about the future of the country. What is interesting in Venezuela is that both the opposition and the ruling party are in government. The government, obviously, at the Presidential level is controlled by someone who has turned himself into a dictator. He is a successor of Hugo Chavez's—he is the President, Nicolas Maduro—and those who surround him. Then there is the National Assembly that is elected by the people of Venezuela, the majority party in their legislative branch.

What has happened over the last year and a half is that the President of Venezuela, Maduro—the now dictator—has nullified the legislative branch. He basically refuses to recognize the laws they have passed and has stopped allowing transfers. So, basically, today, those in the National Assembly in Venezuela are not getting paid. They have no funds for offices, and they have no funds for material. They will pass a law, and those laws are ignored. That is the ongoing crisis.

The second part of it is that, under their Constitution, Venezuela's Constitution, if you had collected a certain number of signatures by December of this year, by the end of the year, they had to hold a referendum on the President, a recall referendum. They refused to certify the signatures even though the people who collected them turned in four times as many signatures as were necessary.

The third is that they are supposed to have a Governor and legislative elections this year in Venezuela. Maduro has canceled those, and there is no telling, but it does not seem as though they are going to have a Presidential election either.

Here is the bottom line: The strife in Venezuela that is going on today can be solved by having an election of the people of Venezuela, by basically following their existing Constitution, but that is not what they have allowed to have happen. On the contrary, not only are they not allowing these elections to happen, but anyone who protests against them has been jailed; press has been kicked out of the country; CNN has been kicked out of Venezuela, as an example. Now we are seeing reports of there being escalating violence in the streets, and it is extraordinary. What is interesting, though, is that fissures are beginning to develop.

The message we send here today—first of all, to those who are in the streets who are fighting for democracy and for following the law and having elections in Venezuela—is that we stand with you. We will never let your cause fall, and we will never accept these ridiculous moves that Maduro is now taking to rewrite the Constitu-

tion, yet again, through a flawed and fraudulent process.

The second message we have is to the people in the Venezuelan Government who do not want to be a part of what is happening. We now see examples of the Attorney General, Luisa Ortega, who is part of the Maduro government and has been largely friendly but who, lately, has begun to break away from the government, going so far as to criticize the government's escalating repression.

You see it increasingly among the rank and file in the National Guard of Venezuela, who are all armored up like G.I. Joe, facing down these unarmed protesters, but on the other side of the protests are their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their wives, their husbands, and their friends and neighbors. What is really troubling now is that these armed groups—irregular groups, these militias—that Maduro has armed and trained with the help of Cuban intelligence have spun completely out of control.

These groups are going around randomly beating people up, setting up roadblocks, and committing all sorts of acts of violence. They are not uniformed. These are collectives, as they call them—basically, these armed militias—outside of the government who are funded, created by Maduro and who have now begun to spin out of control, even to the point at which they, themselves, I believe, are potentially threatened by these groups who, in addition to funding themselves through the government, have found other ways to fund themselves through illicit means, including through street crime.

This situation is reaching a breaking point, and I think it is an important moment to remind the men and women in uniform in the National Guard of Venezuela that their job is to protect the people of Venezuela, not to oppress them; that their job is to protect and uphold the Constitution of that country, not to cancel it out; to remind them that the men and women on the other side of these protests are their families and their fellow Venezuelans.

Now the time has come to tell the men and women in the Venezuelan Government—many who, perhaps, sympathize with Hugo Chavez and Maduro up to a point—that they do not want to go down with this ship, that they do not want to wind up on the list of people who have participated in this crackdown and in this oppression.

I hope that my colleagues here will continue to work hard. I am encouraged by the amount of bipartisan support that we have begun to create on the issue of Venezuela. I know my colleague, Senator CARDIN, and I have worked out bipartisan legislation that urges the Maduro regime to release all of its political prisoners and express support for a solution to the crisis. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in cosigning this bipartisan legislation.

We also support the administration's efforts at the OAS to continue to work